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ABSTRACT

For an instructor who feels the need to teach interviewing skills in the basic course, it is sometimes difficult to fit interviewing into a course that already covers many types of public speaking. An activity is presented that allows instructors to teach interviewing skills in either a one or one-half week time frame (two 50-minute class periods or as many as six 50-minute class periods). This paper outlines the 5-part interviewing activity sequence in detail. The paper explains that the exercise applies to communication principles in the following ways: (1) students need to be prepared for a variety of practical communication activities, such as interviewing; (2) students need to learn the art of storytelling as a way to make themselves memorable for a search committee; (3) students need to see how persuasion fits into interviewing; and (4) students need instruction on nonverbal impressions derived from clothing and jewelry choice. (NKA)

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TEACHING INTERVIEW SKILLS WITHOUT FULL-FLEDGED INTERVIEWING: AN ALTERNATE EXERCISE

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CS 510 737

TEACHING INTERVIEW SKILLS WITHOUT FULL-FLEDGED INTERVIEWING: AN ALTERNATE EXERCISE

Many instructors see the need for teaching interviewing skills in the basic course—especially when one considers that interviewing may be the most important persuasive speech a student will ever give. But how can an instructor fit interviewing into a course that already covers many types of public speaking or is a hybrid that must include topics such as groups, speaking, interpersonal, etc? We use an activity that allows us to teach interviewing skills in either a one or one and one-half week time frame.

The goal of this assignment is to allow students apply what they have learned about interviewing. This assignment, including instructional time and the graded assignment time, can take as little as two 50-minute class periods or as many as six 50-minute class periods.

Activity Sequence:

1. The instructor spends one or two class periods discussing interviewing; depending on the desired depth of coverage, more time may be desired. The lecture/discussion must include how to support an answer by telling a memorable story or giving a detailed example.

2. The instructor provides the students with a list of possible interview questions (see assignment sheet) and asks students to also find a job or career field in which they are interested.

3. On the day of this graded interview assignment, the students come prepared to answer any of the questions on the list. They must wear professional interview attire. The instructor needs a stopwatch and critique sheets; if using Option Two, s/he needs a list of interview questions (for the panel to refer to), and the critique sheets – for him/her and for the students.

4. On the day of the interview:

    a. Option One – One Class Period: If the instructor wants to do the entire activity in one class period, then the students come in, sit in a circle, and hand in a note card that has their name and the position for which they are applying. The instructor sits in the middle of the room, shuffles the cards and calls them one at a time. It is easiest if the instructor swivels around to face the interviewee. The instructor asks one of the questions, and the student must answer in about two minutes. There are no follow-up questions and no prompts for more information. If the student responds to the question "What is your greatest strength?" by saying, "I'm very dependable," then that student is done (and does very poorly on the exercise!). This assignment takes approximately 50 minutes for a class of 25.

b. Option Two – Multiple Class Periods: To give students the opportunity to be both interviewer and interviewee, the instructor puts students into groups made up of four to six people; two groups area assigned to one 50-minute class period (three groups for a 75 minute class period). Both groups meet and the teacher explains that one group will critique first and one group will interview first. The group who is interviewing waits in another room/hallway; the group who is critiquing sits in a semi-circle with a desk at the front for the candidate to sit in. They are given critique sheets (see attached); each person gets one area to critique. One at a time the teacher calls in the candidate, who then introduces him/herself, and sits in the chair/desk facing the panel. A member of the panel asks ***one*** question and when the interviewee finishes answering it (again with no prompts, etc.), he/she exits. Then the group members fill out peer critique sheets. Once critiques are written, the next candidate is invited in the room. The panel may ask all candidates the same question or they can ask a different question to each person. When all the candidates have interviewed, the instructor collects the critiques and the groups switch.

5. One the groups are done interviewing, the instructor debriefs the assignment and answers any questions. At this time, we often ask the class which people had the most memorable answers and what their stories were.

Appraisal:

This exercise applies to communication principles in many ways. First, students need to be prepared for a variety of practical communication activities, including interviewing. Many of our students were unable to articulate their skills and, therefore, had further trouble developing a list of examples/stories to support their assertions. This reinforces the idea that practice makes perfect. And yet, the one student who argued it was ridiculous to "practice" for an interview was the one who stuttered his way through the exercise.

Second, students need to learn the art of storytelling (or using supporting material) as a way to make themselves memorable to the search committee. One-word answers do not demonstrate competence. When a panel of interviewers has to keep probing for information, they are not left with a favorable impression.

Third, students need to see how persuasion fits into interviewing. There are many ties between this activity and what they learned about persuasion, such as increasing their credibility, matching their strengths with the company's goals, and using appropriate support material. Rhetorical sensitivity can be explored as well. The one interviewee who said that her greatest accomplishment was "overcoming her cousin's announcement that he was gay" led to an important classroom discussion on how that statement could be taken as offensive by a great number of people.

Fourth, students need instruction on nonverbal impressions derived from clothing and jewelry choice. We are continually amazed at the number of students who no idea how

to dress for an interview and, unfortunately, rely on television shows as examples (we have seen our fair share of Alley McBeal suits). And some are often so egocentric that they do not understand some interviewers are offended by piercings and tattoos!

We have continued to develop and use this exercise over the past six years, and every semester, during the evaluations, students rate it as one of the most valuable parts of the class.

Additional Resources:

- Helpful websites that include how to prepare for an interview, common interview questions, and dealing with difficult questions.

  http://www.about.com/careers/index.htm - provides career-specific information and includes links to professional organizations.

  http://www.collegegrad.com/ - thorough information including how to negotiate a salary.

  http://www.job-interview.net/ - another thorough website; lets the reader complete a mock job interview using career-specific questions.

  http://www.mbajungle.com - (and then do a search using "interviewing" as the keyword). Great suggestions for a successful interview and realistic stories/examples explaining how to overcome interview disasters. This is one of our favorite sites.

- Although students can use typical employment search websites (www.monster.com) to find a job for this activity, below are links to organizations specific to communication majors. Many of the websites have additional links.

  http://www.womcom.org/jobs.html - **The Association for Women in Communications**: The Association for Women in Communications is a professional organization that champions the advancement of women across all communications disciplines by recognizing excellence, promoting leadership and positioning its members at the forefront of the evolving communications era.

  http://www.roundtable.org/search.html - **Communications Roundtable:** The association of 24 public relations, marketing, graphics, advertising, training, information technology and other communications organizations with more than 12,000 professional members. The goals include furthering professionalism, cooperation between member organizations, career and employment support, meeting and seminar promotion, community service, employer assistance, and membership services and benefits. It is the largest organization of its type in the country.

http://www.jaws.org/jobs.shtml and http://www.jaws.org/jlist.shtml - **The Journalism & Women Symposium**: JAWS brings together women journalists and journalism educators and researchers from across the country -- and sometimes the world -- to meet in an atmosphere of mutual support, professional growth and a chance to exercise the tongue instead of biting it.

http://www.prsa.org/resume2.html - **Public Relations Society of America**: The Careers in Public Relations site is designed to share professional expertise with those interested in public relations as a career, create an "opportunities" network for practitioners, and provide a highly visible outlet for organizations seeking competent and qualified public relations staff.

COMMRC 0300 – Memorandum

TO: All COMMRC 0030 Students

FROM: Bia Bernum, Instructor

RE: **Interview Assignment – 100 pts**

To help you understand the process that you may go through when applying for a job, you will be required to participate in a mock interview. The interview will be set up like a group interview, where you being placed in a room with several of your classmates. In this interview, PLEASE SELECT A POSSIBLE CAREER YOU ARE INTERESTED IN! You will be responding to a question posed by the group interviewing you. The question, which is typical to an employment interview, will be one of the six selected below. **You will be expected to talk for 1 to 2 minutes**, without notes. Remember to not only answer the question, but to preview the answer (summarize it) and support it with actual examples. You will lose points if your answer is under 1 minute. You are expected to dress in appropriate clothing … points will be deducted for jeans, untucked shirts, short skirts, messy appearance . . .. etc. if in doubt, over-dress.

This assignment is worth 100 points:

a) 90 points: you will be graded on your clarity in speaking, how well you answer the question, the examples you choose to support your assertions, the way you dress, and your confidence. Please be aware of your nonverbals, including gestures, facial expressions, and clothing (dress the part). I encourage you to rehearse answering these questions so I do not have to ask for clarification or further information.

1. Tell me about your greatest accomplishment.
2. Tell me about your greatest strength.
3. Tell me about how you handle criticism.
4. Tell me about your greatest weakness.
5. Tell me what motivates you.
6. They may ask an illegal question, so be prepared!

_____/10 1. **Appearance**: rate the applicant on his/her physical appearance. The candidate should be neat, wear appropriate clothing, be well groomed.

_____/20 2. **Organization:** rate the applicant on his/her ability to express him/herself with ease (this is not delivery). Look for a clear focus and direction in what the candidate is saying . . . . The candidate should be able to make his/her point clear and not talk in circles or ramble. There should be a brief introduction and conclusion

_____/10 3. **Language and Delivery:** rate the applicant on his/her ability to speak clearly. Look for articulation (no mumbling), eye contact, and rate (speed). Did the applicant sound phony? Use slang?

_____/35 4. **Support**: rate the applicant on his/her ability to support any assertions. Look for detailed descriptions and situations that demonstrate any skills the applicant mentions. Where these realistic? Give a SPECIFIC example and provide DETAIL!

_____/15 5. **Presence/Confidence:** rate the candidate how well s/he presented him/herself. How did s/he began and end the interview. Look for a firm handshake, eye contact, nervous gestures. Did s/he appear to be genuine? Arrogant?

b) 10 points: you will be put in the same groups you were in for your small group project and will listen to individuals in other groups answer one of the six questions listed above.

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(faculty grading sheet)

Name:
Time:
Career
Question:

_____ Appearance:

_____A qualified candidate will be dressed appropriately for this/her chosen profession. A candidate will avoid sloppy, casual clothing. Fingernails will be neat and clean.

_____A qualified candidate will be wearing understated jewelry.

_____Organization:

_____A qualified candidate will focus on no more than two aspects about him/herself. If s/he lists several, they will become lost and forgotten.

_____A qualified candidate will provide new information rather than repeat the same thing over and over.

_____A qualified candidate will be well organized. S/he will provide a preview _____ and a review _____.

_____Language and Delivery:

_____A qualified candidate will use proper grammar and avoid slang.

_____A qualified candidate will look at everyone in the group.

_____A qualified candidate will enunciate words and will not mumble.

_____A qualified candidate will speak at a comfortable volume; his/her voice will not trail off.

_____A qualified candidate will speak at a comfortable rate/speed.

_____A qualified candidate will not chew gum.

_____Support/Story:

_____A qualified candidate will have mastered the art of story telling; s/he will support any assertions with a SPECIFIC example/story. This story will be thoroughly explained with detail. The story should be memorable.

_____A qualified candidate will make him/herself stand out. S/he will not give cliché answers. The candidate will connect the example to the job s/he is applying for.

_____A qualified candidate will be positive about him/herself and others.

_____A qualified candidate will not make offensive comments.

_____Presence/Confidence:

_____A qualified candidate will have relaxed posture.

_____A qualified candidate will control nervous movements:

_____A qualified candidate will maintain eye contact.

_____A qualified candidate will limit the use of vocalized pauses ("Uhhm, ahh")

Interview grade: _____/90

Group Critique: _____/10 **TOTAL: _____/100**

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(Student grade sheets; each student grades one area. Put 5 of each area on one page, copy, and cut into strips).

1. Appearance: rate the applicant on his/her physical appearance. The candidate should be neat, wear appropriate clothing, be well groomed.

A B C D F Candidate _____

Your Name _____

2. Organization: rate the applicant on his/her ability to answer the question in an organized and orderly fashion. Look for a clear focus and direction in what the candidate is saying .... The candidate should be able to make his/her point clear and not talk in circles or ramble. There should be a preview and review of the question.

A B C D F Candidate _____

Your Name _____

3. Language and Delivery: rate the applicant on his/her ability to speak clearly. Look for articulation (no mumbling), eye contact (look at everyone), and rate (speed). S/he should avoid slang and pronounce words correctly. NO GUM!

A B C D F Candidate _____

Your Name _____

4. Support: rate the applicant on his/her ability to support any assertions – to tell a story that is detailed and vividly describes the situation. Look for examples and situations that demonstrate any skills the applicant mentions. These should be realistic.

A B C D F Candidate _____

Your Name _____

5. Presence/Confidence: rate the candidate how well s/he presented him/herself. S/he should began and end the interview by looking at you. There should be a firm handshake and eye contact, and no nervous gestures. The applicant should appear genuine and not cocky.

A B C D F Candidate _____

Your Name _____

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